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COCAINE TRAFFICKER SENTENCED TO OVER 16 YEARS IN PRISON

*Defendant Ordered to Forfeit \$1.35 Million In Drug Proceeds in this
Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Case*

BALTIMORE, Maryland - United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein announces that today U.S. District Court Judge Andre M. Davis sentenced Willie Peoples, age 37, of Bowie, Maryland to 196 months in prison followed by 5 years of supervised release for conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute cocaine hydrochloride and cocaine base, and conspiracy to engage in money laundering. Judge Davis also ordered Peoples to forfeit \$1.35 million, including various vehicles, real and personal property and money held in bank accounts.

According to the statement of facts presented to the court, from 1994 to January, 2003 Peoples conspired with others to distribute 150 kilograms or more of cocaine hydrochloride or 1.5 kilograms of cocaine base in Maryland and surrounding areas. In 1999, Peoples obtained a source of supply for cocaine hydrochloride in California. The co-conspirator flew to California to provide the money and pick up the cocaine. Upon his return to the Baltimore area, a portion of the cocaine hydrochloride was transformed into cocaine base (commonly referred to as "crack") for distribution and the balance was distributed in its original form. During the course of the conspiracy, Peoples and the co-conspirator pooled their resources on many occasions to finance trips to California to obtain multiple kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride. Airline records reflect that the co-conspirator made about 35 round trips between Baltimore and California. The frequency of the trips varied during a 25 month period during March 1999 to April 2001, but averaged once a month. The quantity of cocaine per trip increased from one kilogram to four, seven, ten and ultimately 20 kilograms. Peoples paid for the cocaine either before or after the trip to California.

The agreed statement of facts further states that on April 19, 2001 agents stopped the co-conspirator upon his return from Los Angeles through BWI Airport. 20 kilograms of cocaine

hydrochloride were found in two suitcases. The co-conspirator placed a call on his cell phone saying "They got me." Review of telephone records revealed that the call was placed to Peoples.

The distribution of the drugs generated large sums of cash which were used by Peoples to buy vehicles, and real and personal property. As the frequency of the trips and number of kilograms increased, the men employed a stash apartment to store the drugs and drug proceeds. Each man also maintained a safe within his home to store drug proceeds. Between 1998 and 2003, Peoples used 8 different bank accounts to deposit \$1.35 million. IRS agents determined that the cash deposited into the bank accounts exceeded the legitimate income reported by Peoples.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein thanked the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation for their investigative work. Mr. Rosenstein commended Assistant United States Attorneys Stephen M. Schenning and Angela White who prosecuted the case.